

John Parke House
345 Main Street
Parkesburg Borough
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1310

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-1310

JOHN PARKE HOUSE

Location: 345 Main Street, Parkesburg Borough, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Borough of Parkesburg.

Present Use: Vacant (Demolished 1977).

Statement of Significance: This small 19th century frame house over a fully raised basement of stuccoed stone was built circa 1846. On the first floor, two rooms had walls decorated with painted murals and trompe-d'oeil woodwork and trim. One of the walls includes a mural showing the house circa 1850; it is in the collection of Herbert Shiffer, Chester County, Pennsylvania, a former owner of the house. The rest of the walls are in the William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At the date of this report, the walls are in storage.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house was probably built around 1846. The Charter of Incorporation for the Glen Run Baptist Church, for which the house most likely served as a parsonage, and the deeds for the land mention the presence of a house on the property as early as 1847.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The heirs of John G. Parke to the trustees of the Glen Run Baptist Church in April, 1847; the trustees of the Glen Run Baptist Church to James McNamee in February, 1850; James McNamee on his death to Anne McNamee in 1869; Anne McNamee to Samuel J. McClellan in 1891; Samuel J. McClellan to H. Etta Williams in 1893; H. Etta Williams to Horace and Etta Clemmer in 1912; Horace and Etta Clemmer to Sarah M. Garnett in 1921; Sarah M. Garnett to George R. Houck in 1949; George R. Houck to Herbert Shiffer in 1964; Herbert Shiffer to Milton Aronauer in 1970. The property is owned by the Borough of Parkesburg in 1976.
4. Original plan and construction: Although in ruinous condition, the house appears to remain as originally planned with a side hall and two rooms to a floor.

5. Alterations and additions: One of the murals shows the house as it appeared circa 1850 when the itinerant painter, Louis Mader, visited it. The present porch has jigsaw brackets on the upper story and a shed roof on the lower story; the earlier porch shown in the mural lacked these features. With the exception of a tin roof and asbestos shingles on two stories, the house appears to be unchanged.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The house probably served as the parsonage for the Glen Run Baptist Church from 1847-1850. Around 1850, Louis Mader, an itinerant artist, painted murals and trompe-d'oeil woodwork and trim in the rooms on the second floor. Very little is known about Louis Mader except that he painted in other houses in southern Chester and Lancaster Counties around the beginning and end of the Civil War.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: A wall from the house with a mural on it, showing the house as it appeared around 1850, is in the collection of Herbert Shiffer, Chester County, Pennsylvania. A HABS photocopy is included in this report.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Clipping and manuscript files in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania under the headings: "Parkesburg. Churches--Baptist" and "Parkesburg. Streets--Main."

Corporation and Property Deeds in the Chester County Courthouse, West Chester, Pennsylvania.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

Coatesville Record. Articles, July 12, 1963, and March 12, 1966.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated: The William Penn Memorial Museum, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania intends to exhibit the walls from the Parke House. Although no date has yet been set for mounting the exhibit, additional information on the house and artist will most likely be available at that time.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This small 19th century frame house, over a fully raised basement of stucco over stone, circa 1846, has a two-story porch.
2. Condition of fabric: The house, having no interior walls, is in ruinous condition. In several places the roof and porch have fallen in. Due to the poor condition of the house, it was not possible to enter it when the site was visited. The Borough of Parkesburg plans to either tear the house down or give it away in a lottery.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house measures approximately 20' (three bays) by 24'. It is two-and-a-half stories over a fully raised basement; the basement being fully above grade on the south elevation.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Frame with stucco over a random rubble stone basement and asbestos shingles on the first and second stories.
4. Porches, stoops: A two-story porch with shed roofs extends one bay beyond the facade, wraps around and runs the length of the east elevation. A stairway on the west side of the porch leads to the principal (first) floor. Jigsaw brackets decorate the four first story pillars and there are similar ornaments in the center of each bay. A steep flight of stone steps rises from the street to the level of the house, ending at the stairs leading to the first floor. Additional stairs, consisting of four stone steps and an iron railing, lead to the basement porch.
5. Chimneys: An interior-end chimney is located near the gable end of the east elevation.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Three doorways have seven-light transoms and architrave trim.
 - b. Windows: All of the windows were six-over-six-light double-hung wooden sash.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A tin, standing seam, gable roof with the ridge parallel to the street.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The house had a simple wooden box cornice with wide eaves.
- c. Dormers: Two gabled dormers located in the center of the roof; one on the south elevation and one on the north elevation.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The house has a side hall plan with the kitchen located in the basement. On the first floor were two rooms with murals painted on the walls. The second floor probably had two rooms. There appears to be an attic.
2. Stairways: Stairs are probably in the side hall, west wall of the house.
3. Flooring: Random width boards. It is possible that some of the floors on the second floor were painted at the time the walls were.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paint on plaster. First floor rooms are decorated with oil murals of European, Asian and American landscapes and trompe-d'oeil woodwork and trim including baseboards, polychrome marbleized dados, chairrails, engaged pilasters, "plaster" ceiling cornice and ornamentation. In the hall a stencil band runs along the wall at about shoulder height.
5. Doorways: Architrave trimmed doorways in the north and south, second floor rooms have semi-elliptical arches formed by two painted trompe-d'oeil engaged piers. An American eagle is painted in each of the arches.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The house appears to have been heated by stoves. There is a fireplace on the east wall of the south room.
 - b. Lighting: Electric.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house occupies a

sloping site facing south on Main Street in a row of similar houses. On the sidewalk in front of it is a high coursed rubble wall with a picket fence on top of it.

Prepared by Marion Morton
December 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative survey of 100 Chester County buildings conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Chester County Historical Society between 1958 and 1962. This was the first large-scale project undertaken after the reinstitution of HABS in 1957, and it established the pattern of cooperation with state and local preservation groups which has characterized the HABS program in recent years. Written data was prepared by Bart Anderson, Curator of the Chester County Historical Society, with the assistance of Jim Sorber and others. HABS hired local professional photographer Ned Goode to take the documentary photographs. The written material was edited and expanded in 1975 by Marion Morton working under contract with HABS.